ANNUAL AFFILIATE REPORT 2020: National Leaders Council

AEU Representatives: Hugh Taft-Morales; Randy Best; Anne Klaeysen as alternate.

Affiliate’s Description: The certified Leaders of the American Ethical Union, with Leaders-in-Training participating. Our meetings are intended (1) to support the Ethical movement with ideas and projects, (2) to share ideas to bring back to our societies and make our work there more effective, (3) to develop our skills and consider ideas, (4) to build deeper relations within the NLC, and (5) renew our energy to serve.

From June 2019 - May 2020, the Leaders held two in-person meetings: June 1019 in Tampa and October 2019 at Murray Grove Retreat Center in New Jersey. Due to COVID-19 the April 2020 in-person meeting was replaced by a series of six 90-minute ZOOM meetings. At the time of this writing we are unsure about how we will connect for a summer meeting.

During the business meeting portion of each NLC gathering, we shared reports from various AEU committees and from the Executive Director, as well as reports about what’s happening in various Societies.

Here is a sampling of some of our activities at the June 2019 NLC meeting:
1) Finalized first edition of an NLC orientation document to help welcome and include new Leaders-in-Training into the NLC;
2) Discussed how the NLC can support the Society Development Team and what else the NLC can do to nurture small groups wanting to join Ethical Culture, and also how this area of work is being addressed in the new Congregational Organizational Development module of training;
3) Continued discussion of new ways to envision Ethical Culture Leadership, including understanding different ministerial roles (pastor, evangelist, prophet, teacher, and apostle); and,
4) Discussed how to address trauma about, or resistance to, clergy which may make some people wary of professional Ethical Culture Leadership.

Here is a sampling of many of our activities at the October 2019 NLC meeting:
1) Discussion of how best the NLC can support of Leaders-in-Training, and the inclusion of dedicated at this meeting for L-in-Ts to prepare for “Decolonizing Ethical Culture” workshop to occur at RYSEC;
2) Discussion of how best to improve movement-wide communication and collaboration; especially through more communication between the AEU Board, the Leadership training process, the NLC, and the Society Development Team; and,
3) Discussion of how to manifest renewed emphasis on professional Leadership given the AEU Board’s statement that professional Leadership essential to movement.

Generally, the National Leaders Council is engaging in self-reflection and reassessment of how to nurture group cohesion. With the total number of Leaders-in-Training now up to six, it is a particularly
appropriate time for the NLC to reexamine how we do business and reassess how to evolve to meet the needs of future generations. We anticipate that greater dialogue within the NLC will challenge assumptions and lead to new and energizing ways for us to function. Recent ZOOM meetings have added a new wrinkle – greater inclusion of Leaders who are unable to travel to NLC in-person meetings.